Your line: According to an Anonymous MIU student, “We have no mental health support, our budgets have been cut to barely nothing. They closed down the University Bookstore and Market. It's a nightmare. The instagram/facebook ads are all a joke. They lure good people in because of marketing but when you get here....78% of it is not real. Maybe even closer to 90%.”

My line: Are people taking herbal supplements, meditating etc exclusively as a method to treat there mental health?

Your line: “Of course they are,” was their response. No, they told us there were no side effects. Theres no qualified mental health staff on site. There are many issues and no one is listening.

They say, “Every time we speak up on mental health we get offered "Check Ins"

We are all bound to 20 mins each morning and afternoon

I have not done the "siddhis." However, from what I know, they meditate for longer hours in that program with extra pujas.

When speaking of their meditation schedules during something called forest retreats they reported, “We round during retreats, which involves an hour about two times a day and watching Maharishi Tapes about 3 times a day. They’re many side effects. These come in "2 week blocks"

One hour in the a.m., and one hour afternoon. But the more you round...the "better. I had my own side effects, of psychological distress, and even pain in the body but they kept telling me "good things are happening." Nothing good ever happened. It was not until I met teachers that had left the movement. Then I got some validation and help with my Meditation.

In the opinion of Fairfielder Alison P, “Politically TMers in Fairfield are all over the place. I think it's more economically driven than by TM. Rich TMers lean more conservative in my experience.

There are a lot of TM folks who like Trump because he had a relative learn TM so they think that'll get TM into the Whitehouse and somehow spread it. I think the townies used to really hate the whole TM group in the past and things have slowly softened over the decades but there is still some distrust and judgement there, and some feeling that some of their stuff is ridiculous, they're not always wrong”

According to sociologist Lane Atmore, “many employees are paid $400.00 a month, leaving them little extra capital for savings. Many can't retire. They can't afford to.”

In the opinion of sociologist Cynthia Hume. “When is a path to enlightenment which sponsors rituals to deities and is based on meditation that deploys the names of God's not a religion?”

The loading of language isolates the group blocking communication with outsiders Gina Catena upon leaving the TM community, says “It was difficult to eliminate the loaded language from my thought process and speech. It was more difficult to extricate TMs loaded language from my thought processes than it was to learn two foreign languages. Others raised in the TM movement but younger than me in age verify the same experience.”

Survivor, Gina Catena accounts during group practice of the TM Sidhi program, a spontaneous wave or liftoff may occur during flying, and a group of individuals bounce about in unison with cheering or laughing aloud. This is called a wave of bliss. This has been orchestrated through suggestion."

Mia Farrow told Maharishi's publicist that, "I'm so fucking mad. Have you ever seen anything like it? I feel like an idiot up on that stage with everyone bowing down to me." She raised a glass of champagne. "To the last night in this holy place, Ha! Maharishi ain't no Saint. He made a pass at me when I was at his house before dinner!" the publicist said. "How could you say something like that?" Mia replied. "Look, I'm no fucking dumbbell. I know a pass when I see one."

A die hard TM adherent Ned Wynn doubted Mia Farrow claims stating that Maharishi couldn't have made a pass as he was a celibate. She turned to him, telling him, "don't you think I know when a man wants to fuck me?"

According to Bronte Baxter alienated flower child, "People gave up dreams of love and a family to follow their guru's advice, believing they were serving their enlightenment and the highest social good. My best friend, intensely in love with her husband, was divorced by him when the monastic programs started. He became a celibate, while my friend tried to live as a nun with her broken heart. Within months she developed cancer, dying a couple years later. She forewent Western treatment to pursue an alternative healing system: Ayurveda, India's ancient "world medicine" which then was being revived by Maharishi. Her physician was Deepak Chopra, at the time TM's poster boy and its leading Ayurvedic physician. My friend Sharon withered away and died, but Ayurveda grew in popularity."

According to survivor Gina Catena, “with my well-intentioned loved ones, I watched devotees donate entire trust funds, become psychotic (due to long term meditation), and decline needed medical treatment in favor of Maharishi Ayur-Ved Medicinals. A few committed suicide. Our leaders taught us that hardships were brought upon ourselves. No one blamed overindulgence in trance like meditation, or circuitous theology. After all, no one drank kool-aid.”

Survivor Gina Catena speaks of her time in the movement in the essay Program Pedophilia, “many TM parents left their children for months on end while parents attend advance programs. Children are often left with a hodgepodge of caretakers. Child abandonment for enlightenment is deemed to magically benefit the entire family. These are typical cult dynamics. The higher mission, as defined by the charismatic leader Maharishi Mahesh Yogi supersedes all.”

Catena also adds in a private conversation that, "The degree of abandonment of kids, was often dependent upon the parents’ financial situation. The wealthier have personal Nannies. Middle income pay for group childcare. Others do a co-op, rotating turns caring for kids. And some just plain leave their kids unsupervised. I knew of some who just locked their home, leaving untended babies in a playpen. True believers can justify anything for the deemed-highest cause." She left the movement in the late 80’s.

MILIEU CONTROL

Lifton describes control over communication within an environment.

“When control is extremely intense, it becomes internalized control, managing a person’s inner communication.” (5)

TM programs apply various forms of control. The first stage of communication control begins with instruction or “Initiation” to TM when the new Initiate is gently instructed, “never speak the mantra aloud.” While the instructor explains that speaking the mantra would bring it to the crude level of speech, in reality the new initiate is gently trained to keep secrets “for his or her own good.”

Environmental control is exercised through mandated silence in the meditation domes, or enforced weeks of group silence on advanced courses. The monastic branches of TM, “Mother Divine” and “Purusha”, maintain a tightly controlled schedule for their participants. (6)

Information control includes Maharishi’s insistence that adherents watch edited version of televised news, permitting only ‘good news’ for course participants. Course participants are taught their meditation creates environmental influence “for world peace” thus increasing global good news. They are taught that exposure to “negativity” from bad news would taint pure consciousness, hindering their spiritual evolution. In this way, participants gently learn to ignore bad news and uncomfortable information.

The person-under-the-influence (or thought reform victim) then negates uncomfortable information as it stems from “negativity” or from “ignorance.” To squelch anxiety from threatening ideas, the victim may return to patterned responses and behaviors or attack in irrational defensiveness.

Additionally, Maharishi bombards course participants with advanced TM “knowledge” recordings. Repetitions of the same information do not create understanding, but merely listener acceptance. Maharishi drones the same information again and again. The listener’s mind relaxes and “absorbs the knowledge” without question. With repeated exposure, this can conflict with individual autonomy as a person may relinquish critical analysis.

Environment control is further exhibited through controlled Vastu architecture. The TM Movement is building “Peace Palaces” around the world, architecturally designed to Maharishi Sthapatya-Ved specifications. This unique milieu is different from other building environments, but each Peace Palace will resemble all other such palaces in the world. This supports an inner dissociation from the outside world for those residing within “palace” confines.

“Often a sequence of events, such as seminars, lectures, group encounters, which become increasingly intense and increasingly isolated, making it extremely difficult-- both physically and psychologically--for one to leave. (This) sets up a sense of antagonism with the outside world; it's "us against them”. (This is) Closely connected to the process of individual change of personality.” (7)

Environmental control is created in a variety of ways, through geographic distance

TM communities isolate themselves to varying degrees from larger surrounding communities.
Group process supports isolation through the TM-course mandated buddy system, lack of transportation when participating in a rounding (prolonged meditation) course, regimented schedules on advanced programs, or in the new “Peace Palace” compounds.

Each of the aforementioned methods of control influence sensory perception and neural development. Lifton's second criteria of thought reform addresses "mystical

manipulation."

MYSTICAL MANIPULATION (Planned spontaneity)

“Additionally behaviors and emotions are orchestrated in such way to appear to arise spontaneously from within the environment.”

For example, during group practice of the TM-SidhiTM program, a spontaneous “wave” or “lift off” may occur during “flying” and a group of individuals bounce about in unison with cheering or laughing aloud. This is called “a wave of bliss.” In actuality, this has been orchestrated through suggestion of such experiences in the “knowledge meetings.”

Any positive event in life is explained as “Support of Nature” for living “a life of purity.” Individual behaviors and hard work are never credited with resulting fortune, but rather the result of mystical “Nature’s Support.” However, negative outcomes in life are blamed on the individual for not being good enough, not having adequately earned “Support of Nature.” To gain appropriate “Support of Nature,” one is encouraged to purchase expensive yagyas (mystical prayer ceremonies costing thousands of dollars), donate more time or money to spreading the teaching, or attending more expensive advanced meditation programs.

Retrospective evaluation of positive news events is designed to demonstrate “spontaneous support of nature because of super radiance effect from group TM-Sidhi TM practice.” This propaganda creates mystical enthusiasm in adherents, nothing more.

Maharishi’s request to hear others’ esoteric meditation experiences (on the current “Invincible America” course held in Vedic City/ Fairfield, Iowa) subconsciously inspires internal mystical experiences for some. Many want the privilege of sharing their experiences publicly with their deemed Spiritual Master. (We could also address whether

emphasis on mystical inner visions increases risk of psychosis).

“Totalist leaders claim to be agents chosen by God, history, or some supernatural force, to carry out the mystical imperative.”

Maharishi claims descendence from an ancient Indian “Holy Tradition.” This provides an exclusive connection for mystical divination. (

As one slides the slippery slope into TM, from involvement at regional TM center meetings with the kindest people you could ever meet, group meditations, advanced courses, TM, TM-SidhisTM, the lifestyle of Maharishi Ayur-VedTM may become the only recognized path to enlightenment,

“so that the cult and its beliefs become the only true path to salvation (or enlightenment)”

“The individual then develops the psychology of the pawn, and participates actively in the manipulation of others.” (4)

At this point, a well-intentioned meditator, Sidha, TM Teacher, or “Governor” identifies with the group message over their individuality. The individual fulfills directives from their leaders to recruit and retain others, completely unaware that they spontaneously are acting on the wishes of Maharishi's recruitment efforts.

My TM loved ones request, “Gina, move back here. We love and miss you. You’ll have support of nature if you live here. It will be the best thing for your evolution.” They mean well. I love them too! I also know that full acceptance into their world would require me to relinquish some critical thinking to directives originating from Maharishi’s center in Vlodrop, Netherlands.

“The leader who becomes the center of the mystical manipulation (or the person in whose name it is done) can be sometimes more real than an abstract god and therefore attractive to cult members.”

Maharishi, Bevan Morris, Raja Hagelin and other spokespersons for the higher knowledge can seem more accessible than an abstract deity. The leaders and group dynamic offer immediate validation for “good” behavior rather than relying upon an internalized value set, which lacks feedback. TM leadership rewards "good" behavior through praise and exclusivity for bringing global influence toward world peace, enlightenement, expansion of happiness and spreading creativity and bliss to others.

The combined effects of this psychological manipulation

“Legitimizes the deception used to recruit new members and/or raise funds, and the deception used on the ‘outside world’."

The greatest deception was done to ourselves by our own minds, by believing that all was good because it felt good!

Working for the higher good of global enlightenment, world peace, perfect health and personal enlightenment provides the noblest motives.

TM is deceptively presented to the business and educational communities for “deep rest and release of stress.” TM teachers are aware of their selective deception while making recruitment presentations.

True Believers justify deception, believing that slow revelation of this “path to enlightenment and pure bliss” is in the best interest of new recruits. The True Believer lacks malfeasance. S/he believes in the ultimate goodness of their deception. The end justifies the means. Sincerity in itself is a valuable recruitment tool.

THE DEMAND FOR PURITY

For those who succumb to living within the TM Movement full time,

“The world becomes sharply divided into the pure and the impure, the absolutely good (the group/ideology) and the absolutely evil (everything outside the group).” (3)

Once having embraced the TM community mentality, anything outside the TM world may be perceived as a threat. It was frightening for me to consider leaving the TM community many years ago. I was afraid of the “negativity” and “ignorance” of the world. I received praise and validation within the Movement. The “purity” of our devoted community felt safe, despite regimentation, dogma, professional struggles, repressed stories of child neglect and abuse.

I was even more anxious because I lacked (professional and social) skills for the real world, after a lifetime within the Movement. My exhusband, children and I eventually left, stumbled, then thrived.

On a recent phone call, one TM acquaintance expressed fears, “I don’t know how you live out there, Gina. Your spiritual evolution is hindered from being surrounded by so much negtivity. This must be so hard for you. I know how evil the world is out there. I have a cousin strung out on cocaine in San Diego.”

When I explained that her cousin is an exception to the norm, she refused to consider otherwise, insisting, “No, there are rakshasas (evil demons) lurking everywhere out there. Anyone can succumb at any time, just like my cousin. We have the finest purity here. I could never go anywhere else, despite our problems.”

Another middle-aged devotee, also raised in the Movement, traveled the world within the Movement's echelons for decades. In her fifties, upon returning from her first solo weekend journey exclaimed, "It's scary out there!" She perceived the world as threatening.

Believing in the power of pure "Vastu architecture", some TM devotees refuse to enter a building with a south-facing entrance, because it would bring mystical evil energy. These True Believers will only enter buildings of architectural purity, lest they become spiritually tainted by impure architecture. They state they can "think more clearly", or their "consciousness feels expansive" when inside pure Vastu construction.

Others who cannot afford a custom built Vastu-approved home, or an expensive remodel of their existing home, feel inadequate because their home is not appropriately pure. They avoid their south facing entrances, and apologize for lack of proper alignment of walls and windows.

Should I rejoice that True Believers avoid my home's south-facing front entrance? In actuality, it saddens me. They could blame my south facing entryway as the evil influence upon my consciousness, inspiring this impure essay!

Each year upon his deemed birthday, January 12th, Maharishi emerges from his annual "period of silence" to inspire the Movement for the coming year's momentum. Devoted followers "must continually change or conform to the group norm." (4) He announces another standard of inspirational purity with each new year.

The TM group norm continually changes. This keeps everyone striving for the utmost growth in purity. In the 1970's women were required to dress in casually elegant business attire. Now women often wear sarees regardless of their culture of origin.

In the sixties and seventies, astrology and other esoterica were frowned upon; Maharishi directed us not to dabble in other forms of spirituality. We were to "protect the purity of the teaching." TM followers cheated to study astrology, past lives or other mystical teachings. Seeing a potential customer base, the TM Movement then cornered the market on esoterica with trademarked astrology, music, jyotishi consultants (Hindu mystics), mystical gem sales, architectural styles and expensive yagyas (spiritual ceremonies) to generate higher consciousness, perfect health and prosperity. Outside sources of esoterica are considered not as pure as those promoted by Maharishi's organization.

Of course, that of the utmost "purity" (from Maharishi) comes with the highest price tag, most exclusive social circles, and greatest restrictions upon outside influence.

"Tendencies towards guilt and shame are used as emotional levers for the group's controlling and manipulative influences." (5)

The basic concept is if one stays "with the program" he or she will eventually receive the carrot on a stick – pure bliss or enlightenment. If one leaves, he or she risks losing everything.

Another devotee jokes of having been a "rascal on the spiritual path," as if following inner dictates were inherently impure, rather than a joyous celebration of individuality. Personal directives would deter one from the "Path." The "Path" as outlined by Maharishi, is the only recognized pure method of spiritual advancement.

How sad to self-judge and restrict oneself, for having an inner sense of purpose.

When my good friend's son died of an inoperable brain tumor in San Diego, a Maharishi University faculty member told her husband, "Your son died because you left the life supporting influence of our TM community." In essence, the University faculty member

said their son's tragic death was due punishment for having left Fairfield.

True devotees hold themselves to high standards of purity, continually failing to attain perfection. And we thought Catholic guilt was bad!

“Once a person has experienced the totalist polarization of good/evil (black/white thinking), he has great difficulty in regaining a more balanced inner sensitivity to the complexities of human morality.”

Real life has grey zones, where an individual determines one’s own balance among conflicting demands.

When a person bases his or her life upon externally derived definitions of right from wrong, he or she may lose the ability to make personal value-judgments.

Personal self determination is especially difficult for those coming through my home after having been raised within the TM Movement. This difficulty with self-determination may account for the frequency with which many former TMers become guru-hoppers (not levitating, but jumping between various spiritual groups). Many leave TM’s dysfunction, but seek other external directives or group definition.

Even long after leaving the TM community, many individuals continue to judge others as “good” or “bad” according to a pre-measured determination of “spirituality.” Their TM-based internalized idealism continues as the barometer of worthiness.

There is no “all good”, nor “all bad”, even within the TM Movement. Most would agree that those attracted to our cult's idealism are kind, well-intentioned, idealistic individuals. We created a sweet caring community. Our goal was Utopia. In some ways, that was achieved! Many benefited through TM and association with the organization. However, many were

seriously damaged.

True devotees were indoctrinated through programmatic thought reform methods (commonly known as “mind control” or “brainwashing”). Not everyone succumbs to full indoctrination, as Joe Kellet describes in his “free fall down TM’s rabbit hole.”

Those who experienced the “free fall down TM’s rabbit hole” are challenged when integrating into society. They must self determine without a spiritual drill-sargent. The challenge lies in the battle within one's own mind. In real life, there is no "absolute purity" for which to strive.

CONFESSION

"Cultic confession is carried beyond its ordinary religious, legal and therapeutic expressions to the point of becoming a cult in itself." (1)

Forced confessions are used by a variety of cultic groups, especially in closed Large Group Awareness Trainings (LGATs) or cult-like all night Bible revivals. TM does not agressively employ this method of thought reform (we got a break on this one!)
TM employs this tactic on applications for advanced courses, and for publicly "sharing of experiences" with Maharishi.

On applications for advanced courses, an applicant must essentially prove emotional stability by stating that he or she never had need for therapy or other forms of external support outside of the TM Organization. It is also important to state that one does not abuse drugs or alcohol. The nature of the application, and desireabilty of acceptance to advanced courses, often encourgae a person to lie about external associations. Applicants

often lie, denying marital counseling or other involvements. On the other hand, I know of many individuals who avoided seeking help because they feared being ostracized from advanced programs.

Cult-like public confessionals are "an act of symbolic self-surrender. Making it virtually impossible to attain a reasonable balance between worth and humility." (2)

TM confessionals exist in “sharing of experiences” when meditators come forth to share spiritual visions such as, “golden soma dripping down my scalp,” or “past life visions of torturing others during the inquisition, and now burning off such karma through prolonged meditations,” or "envisioning the mantra as the guide leading me through the portal to pure Absolute bliss." These are actual confessionals that I heard from others. The more "flashy" one's experience, especially if it involved visitation by Hindu dieties or karmic connections to past lives, the greater Maharishi praised the confessor.

However, TM teachings deny validity of psychotherapy. Confessing one's inner insecurities and goals comes close to true therapy and is thus officially avoided with TM.

Maharishi teaches that, “therapy merely stirs up the mud in one’s consciousness. For true help one must transcend to the deep Absolute pure bliss of one’s awareness. Through repeated exposure to the transcendent layer of life, the transcendent will gradually permeate all levels of one’s awareness. In this way the mud, or stress, of one’s life is washed away. Therapy works only on the surface level of life and is of no use.”

If someone received effective therapy, he or she might decide to leave the TM organization!

With experience confessionals, an unstated spiritual hierarchy is created amongst participants, "The more I accuse myself, the more I have a right to judge you" (3). This encourages those with flashy experiences to feel superior to those who do not speak of

such inner glamor.

One former TM-teacher, "Governor" said, "I think there was a kind of informal confessional -- or at least I thought there was when I wrote my Lifton paper for Jajna. On staff, there was a kind of competition to claim the most fucked-up award for our pre-TM days. I used to do so much acid, my first marriage was a nightmare before TM, etc., etc. It wasn't ritualized with speeches from the dais, but it was a kind of bonding-confession."

SACRED SCIENCE

“The totalist milieu maintains an aura of sacredness around its basic doctrine or ideology, holding it as an ultimate moral vision for the ordering of human existence. Questioning or criticizing those basic assumptions is prohibited. A reverence is demanded ... Offers considerable security to young people because it greatly simplifies the world and answers a contemporary need to combine a sacred set of dogmatic principles with a claim to a science embodying the truth about human behavior and human psychology.” (4)

Maharishi’s Science of Creative IntelligenceTM, the Holy Tradition of Spiritual Masters, the copyrighted ancient Ayur Vedic methods are deemed infallible sources of truth. Questioning the veracity of these myths is akin to blasphemy for a devoted TMer.

Maharishi began to use Wallace and Benson's studies of brainwave during TM as the basis of a 'scientific verification' for the effficacy of Transendental Meditation. Benson later proved identical results found with practitioners of traditional forms of Buddhist and Judeo-Christian meditation. The sacredness of TM research however continues.

Larry Domash, PhD, Deepak Chopra, MD, John Hagelin, PhD and other educated devotees continue to apply scientific terminology to the esoteric teachings of TM, to marketing their beliefs. Stress researchers receive funding for research on TM, when in fact other methods

would prove as beneficial, as Benson demonstrated.

For those not versed in true science, this blur of science and esoterica creates a belief system based upon distorted science, thus Lifton's "sacred science."

LOADING THE LANGUAGE

“The language of the totalist environment is characterized by the thought-terminating cliché (thought-stoppers) Repetitiously centered on all-encompassing jargon, The language of non-thought. Words are given new meanings -- the outside world does not use the words or phrases in the same way -- it becomes a "group" word or phrase.” (1)

Loaded language isolates a person from meaningful communication with others who do use words in the same way. The classic TM thought-stopping cliché is the attribution of any sadness or anxiety to “unstressing.” A person will discredit discomfort or doubts by believing they are “unstressing.”

Another thought stopping cliché is taught during the TM-checking procedure “if you experience any roughness, pay it no mind and gently return awareness to the mantra.” In that one sentence, TM teachings acknowledge that some individuals may experience anxiety or "roughness" in response to this meditation practice, and simultaneously denies the validity of inner conflict by directing a person to return to their hypnotic mantra-repitition. Many currently practicing TMers, and former TMers, say they automaticly return to the mantra, even involuntarily, during times of stress.

Other altered terms are common to TM-speak such as gaining "Spontaneous Support of the Laws of Nature" when things fall into place in one's life solely because they meditate. “Bliss” refers to experiencing the “transcendent” or the source of all thought within ourselves. The physics term “Unified Field” refers alternately to “transcendental

consciousness," "God," "Being," or "the Absolute." "Ignorance" refers to that state of not having learned TM, such as that of any outsider. "Group concsiousness" or "coherence" refers to the power of the group process. More specific Vedic-derived terms apply to minutiae of lifestyle guidelines for diet, dress, architecture, food supplements, music, astrology and gemstone therapies.

Upon leaving the TM community, I struggled to integrate into my present community (family suburbia). It was difficult to eliminate the loaded language from my thoughts and speech. It was more difficult to extricate TM's loaded language from my thought processes, than it was to learn two foreign languages. Others raised in the TM movement, but younger than me in age, verify the same experience.

One young woman said, "those thoughts and directions keep coming in my head. They get in the way of everything. It's hard to shake off those inner life cliche's and focus on tasks in front of me. Some things are good, but others just prevent me from thinking properly. And that mantra! It still keeps coming in my head. What the f**k is THAT about? I just want it to go away!"

DOCTRINE OVER PERSON

"Every issue in one's life can be reduced to a single set of principles." (2)

When in the TM mindset, The Science of Creative Intelligence (SCI) and Maharishi Ayur-Ved are the only accepted sources of truth and life principles. Maharishi taught us the 33 lesson course of SCI encompasses all the "Laws of Nature."

"If one questions the beliefs of the group or the leaders of the group, one is made to feel that there is something inherently wrong with them to even question -- it is always "turned around" on them and the questioner/criticizer is questioned rather than the questions

answered directly. The underlying assumption is that doctrine/ideology is ultimately more valid, true and real than any aspect of actual human character or human experience and one must subject one's experience to that "truth."(3)

To be truly on the TM path to enlightenment, there is limited acceptable variation of individual thought or expression. Maharishi taught us that doubting (him) could jeopardize our chances to enlightenment. He threatened with, “If you doubt, the doubt will manifest. Never doubt.” We were afraid to question.

The experience of contradiction can be immediately associated with guilt. One is made to feel that doubts are reflections of one's own evil. When doubt arises, conflicts become intense.” (4)

Many who leave the TM organization do not tell old friends, or family members, of their decsions to live outside the TM paradigm after moving away. Current True Believers (TBs) attempt to reconvert us back to TM. The thoughtful person who left the TM program, is deemed misguided at best, and evil at worst. (I am officially a lost cause now!)

Speaking against the TM organization risks losing our loved ones, and being ostracized for ever. Prior posts on this blog, and some comments, express the knee-jerk defensive response that many devout TMers have to our online discussion and analysis. It is sad to read vehement attacks on us here and elsewhere on the internet, in defense of threatened ingrained beliefs. We once also believed that those who spoke against TM were "lost in ignorance," or erroneously directing their "unstressing." We thought, "If only they would meditate again, their anxiety would leave and they would see the light again."

“The pattern of doctrine over person occurs when there is a conflict between what one feels oneself experiencing and what the doctrine or ideology says one should experience.” (5)

Inner conflict between doctrine and personal thinking, as described by Lifton, may be the cause of TM-related psychosis and suicides. Since most of those who committed suicide did not leave notes behind, we cannot know with certainty.

When inner thoughts conflict with the deemed-to-be-ultimate-truth, one's community, and everything one loves, an existential crises may ensue. The TM solution to this "experience of intense unstressing" would be to return to meditate and calm oneself. This silences disquieting thoughts by returning to transcendence, or a self induced inner trance.

"Witnessing" in TM refers to the state of observing oneself as if an outsider, ostensibly because one is grounded in the "Absolute" (God) and experiences even their own existence as cosmically inconsequential. The doctrine and inner experience is more important than any individual. The ultimate goal of TM's "transcendence" is "Cosmic Consciousness."

TM teaches that in Cosmic Consciouisness (CC), one observes even themselves as if from the outside, twenty-four hours per day. This constant separation of self is the goal. The individuality leaves and all creation is ultimately connected as one in the highest state of Unity Consciousness (UC). In UC the ultimate dimunition of personhood would be exalted, as individual personhood disappears. Unity Consciousness is the extreme valuation of "doctrine over person," since personal idenity ceases.

DISPENSING OF EXISTENCE

"Since the group has an absolute or totalist vision of truth, those who are not in the group are bound up in evil, are not enlightened, are not saved, and do not have the right to exist. "Being verses nothingness""(1)

Fully devout TMers call us (on this blog) demons, dull, sentenced to eternity in hell and

worse. TM's devoted believe they have the true path to enlightenment, and others' opinions are unworthy of consideration.

Those who have not learned TM are considered to live "lives of ignorance." To have a life in ignorance is akin to a fate worse than death. Many TM devotees and youth, including myself decades ago, fear to live outside their global community's protected shell. They cannot meaningfully connect with outsiders. Leaving the movement to live on the outside was one of the more difficult decisions and processes of my life. It took years to convince my then-husband to leave, and years to learn to function outside. Was it worth the effort? A rejoicing Yes!

Upon a recent visit to Fairfield, one TM friend said, "How do you make friends out there? I want to leave. We are dying here, but it takes a Sidha to know a Sidha." Using TM's loaded language, she stated that it takes another semi-enlightened being for her to form a friendship. She is unable to connect with non-TMers. She acknowledges her inability to relate outside of her cult mindset.

"One outside the group may always receive their right of existence by joining the group."(2)

Once learning TM, according to the higher teachings, one's "good karma outweighs his/her bad karma. A person has received the key to enlightenment," or admission to the spiritually elite. Outsiders are actively recruited to join the elite group. Once initiated, a person is accepted as one-of-us. Thus, upon earning this point of entry, initiation, a person is instantly accepted as spiritually elite.

"Fear manipulation -- if one leaves this group, one leaves God or loses their transformation, for something bad will happen to them. The group is the "elite", outsiders are "of the world", "evil", "unenlightened", etc."(3)

Leaving the TM group is not restricted to changing geographic locale. A person can leave the community, but continue in the mindset whether involved with a TM Center, or living quietly as a TM-yogi. However, to disavow the teachings is to choose a "life of ignorance."

When still in the group, and group members moved away, we rarely thought about them. It was assumed they had chosen a less valuable life. We stayed in touch with an occasional friend, hoping for their eventual return. We were preoccupied with our TM-centered endeavors, building heaven-on-earth, our Taste of Utopia, or recruiting to Maharishi University. We were community-centric in our creativity, lifestyle and goals.

When I relocated away, it was with the implicit understanding that I would lose connection with loved ones in the community. Leaving was a painful decision, knowing that I chose a break with my history and all that I loved. Their quest for enlightenment defined my decision as a move to the-dark-side, to be "lost to the world of ignorance".

Connections with loved ones inside the TM Movement were maintained only by my efforts. There was no effort on the part of those within the group to maintain connections with someone who left. Why should they? The lives of committed devotees are involved with something they deem more noble. That is how it goes.

TM Sidha communities busily build "Utopia" or "Maharishi's Ideal Society," just as Jonestown built "Paradise." Fortunately, Maharishi lacks a taste for death. Our Fool-on-the-hill is smarter than Jones and built something of global mulitbillion-dollar proportions.

Most former TMers do not return. Their departure was prompted by awakening to TM's underbelly. As Joseppi writes on his profile, he walked away and "until early in 2006, I never looked back." Unlike converts who later leave, those raised in the group maintain connections, as the group is our family. If we speak our mind, our history will reject us. We keep dark secrets to protect our family and loved ones.

Upon several return visits to the community, many welcome me home with open arms. They encourage my family to return, touring us through new Vastu-Vedic buildings, crooning over Maharishi's latest plans for global enlightenment. These developments come at high price. Further questioning reveals that many other now-grown youth left. Devotees whose children have relocated are saddened and do not understand why their adult children maintain distance.

Others will not converse with me, as if shunning. I believe that my presence, as having succeeded on the outside, threatens their paradigm. I should apologize for having a happy fulfilling life on the outside. I should have failed in the world's ignorance.

Admitedly, it can be lonely out here, after leaving one's family of origin in cult mentality. After cult-life, nothing compares to the high of our connection and purpose.

Some folks return years after having left the community, because they struggled in the real world. Failure on the outside confirms, for True Believers, their spiritual safety net from demonic outside influences. They do not question if the TM mindset (programming) was so ingrained to interfere with outside social and professional relationships. The community jokingly refers to this latter-return phenomenon as "the rubber band effect." This plays upon "The Maharishi Effect" wherein large groups of meditators support global peace and crime reduction.

One old friend, upon returning to Fairfield after a miserable twenty-year failed hiatus on the outside, said, "It is wonderful to be back in this pure atmosphere. I've returned to the womb!" He believes he returned to the spiritual source of creation. Or perhaps he returned to an emotional childhood, relinquishing himself to group directives.

Lifton's seminal model of eight criteria of Thought Reform when taken together, create a

powerful affect on the psychology and physical brain structures. Any one or two of the criteria can be identified with any group. But in combination, they form a strong group bond, difficult to combat within the psyche. Of course, there are degrees of indoctrination, just as there are degrees of alcohol use. It is important to be wary of the influence spectrum. When taken together, the dynamics can be hazardous.

“In combination, they create an atmosphere which may temporarily energize or exhilarate, but which at the same time pose a grave human threat.” (4)

There is a spectrum to be aware of. TM twice a day causes no harm to my knowledge. However, a full cult conversion is a risk for the vulnerable.

But by the grace of God, there go I.